

**Suggestions for Interpretation of Flor Peeters'  
Selected Short Organ compositions  
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**1. "Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme", "Wake, Awake, for Night is Flying" opus 68, #5**

*"Wake, awake, for night is flying" The watchmen on the heights are crying; "Awake, Jerusalem, arise!"*

*Midnight hears the welcome voices and at the thrilling cry rejoices:*

*"Oh, where are ye, ye virgins wise? The Bridegroom comes, awake! Your lamps with gladness take!*

*Hallelujah! With bridal care yourselves prepare to meet the Bridegroom, who is near."*

There are symbolic elements to this chorale prelude. In the conception of the composer, the chorale or hymn is to be played on a trumpet stop. In the organ of Mechelen cathedral there is a trumpet in the Kroonwerke which is high over head, to suggest the sound of a distant trumpet in the hands of watchmen on top of the wall. The trumpet stop should be enclosed, that is, behind swell shutters that can be opened and closed to permit dynamic expression.

In between these phrases of the chorale, there is a running melody which Flor Peeters called the "concertato." This is symbolic of the world's people, forever busily running about in daily pursuits, nonchalant, not caring nor heeding the trumpet calls of the watchmen.

In the concertato there is a "thème génératrice" or motive, (the first three notes), which returns periodically throughout the piece. In my score Flor Peeters has marked short red lines over this recurring motive to remind me to "insist" slightly on them. He also suggested playing this concertato lightly, with scale-wise ascending passages legato and the descending passages with some portato or non legato. The broken chords in the melodic line would be played lightly portato. He also marked in special phrasing, alternating legato and portato in some sequential passages.

Professor Peeters cautioned not to exaggerate the opening of the swell shades of the trumpet.

When listening to a recording of Flor Peeters playing the chorale passages on the trumpet stop, the general impression is legato in the articulated sense (very slight articulations between chords.) In measures 23 and 50 he plays the melody in two-note slurs, followed in the next measure by slightly articulated chords on beats 1 and 2.

**Registration:** Pedal: Flute 16, 8; Gt: Flute 8, 2, Spitzquint 1 1/3; Sw: Trumpet 8 (Schalmei), + cimbel 3-4s

**Tempo** on recording by Flor Peeters: 5' 22" or quarter note at 62-69

**2. "O God, Thou Faithful God" opus 68 #2**

*"O God, Thou faithful God, Thou Fountain ever flowing, who good and perfect gifts in mercy art bestowing,*

*Give me a healthy frame, and may I have within a conscience free from blame, a soul unhurt by sin."*

In my score, Flor Peeters underlined with two ink lines the word "sostenuto" in the indicated tempo "Andante sostenuto." (One dictionary of musical terms suggested that "sostenuto" is similar to "cantabile.")

Flor Peeters suggested a vocal style, lengthening slightly the 1<sup>st</sup> note, proceeding by tightening the tempo slightly as the line rises, and then at the end of the phrase a very slight loosening of the tempo. (When I first began to study with him, he had me sing and play Gregorian chant for several weeks to become familiar with vocal style.)

The chorale melody in this chorale prelude alternates between the soprano in the 1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> phrases and the tenor in 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> phrases. Note that the tenor melody in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> phrases is but a repetition of the soprano in the first and third phrases respectively, which imitates the repetitions found in the original chorale (which are all in the soprano). Flor Peeters called my attention to the counterpoint of the accompanying voices which is almost always invertible. He said the tenor melody "must be played with warmth, as lyric as a cello."

Play with freedom in the cadences to announce and introduce the next entry of the melody line.

And "sing the inner parts with the fingers." Flor Peeters placed accent lines on two special notes at the end of the piece, 4<sup>th</sup> measure from the end—alto "f sharp" and 2<sup>nd</sup> meas. from the end "c sharp"; this can also give some guidance to similar passages earlier in the piece and how to make them "sing" according to the motive: when the motivic note is dissonant and then resolves -- either delay the arrival of the accented note or prolong slightly its value.

Shaping the phrases slightly with the swell boxes as indicated will necessitate rearranging the pedaling.

Tempo on recording by Flor Peeters: 2' 07", quarter note about 60-66.

**3. Aria (opus 51)**

Aria, composed in 1937, was originally the middle section of the "Sonata for Trumpet and Piano." A student at the conservatory, Berten de Keyzer, heard it on the radio and suggested that he arrange the middle section as a piece for solo organ. This student later died in a German concentration camp during WW II, and in his memory, Flor Peeters arranged and dedicated this organ solo to him in 1945.

Flor Peeters offered a copy of this piece as a gift to me, and in the dedication he wrote "study for repeated notes in the left hand." As I learned this piece under his tutelage, he said that the L.H. repeated-note chords would lose about ½ the value of the notes, because of the accompaniment nature of that L.H. hand. But what about the chords that are not repeated or in which only some of the tones are repeated? As I learned it, he pointed out the secondary or counter melodies, which if not played legato, would be lost. (In the original piano accompaniment, of course these counter melodies could be brought out by "voicing" or playing with more pressure, ie., louder, but on the organ these must be legato in order to stand out in the repeated chords.)

The second reason to play certain left hand notes legato would be the resolution of a dissonant note, as in the last chord on the first page, where the "g" resolves to "f sharp" and finally on the 3<sup>rd</sup> beat the "e" to the "d"; play these legato while repeating the repeated notes.

Learning the L.H. is a challenge, and it takes some time to build the muscles and to develop fingering. But with the mastery of the L.H., the attention must finally shift to the R.H. which must be played in vocal style, freely, with beautiful shaping of phrases by means of tightening and relaxing the tempo (with *rallentando* at cadences) and with opening and closing of the swell shutters.

In my score, Flor Peeters crossed out "Adagio" and marked in "Andante" so that I would play the Aria at a little more lively tempo.

He asked me one day what was the "thème génératrice" or generating idea or motive? Frankly, I hadn't noticed, so he called my attention to the last three notes of the first phrase, the "g, f natural, g" (which in the key of G is modal—lowered 7<sup>th</sup>.) He suggested a slight insistence on these three tones. As these 3 notes are played in the R.H., the pedal always has a "G" which must be released before the manual "f natural" to avoid sounding the interval of the 7<sup>th</sup> as in a dominant 7<sup>th</sup> chord. This is especially important in the next to last measure of the piece, where the "f natural" is a quarter note, which means that there must be a quarter rest in the pedal between the repeated notes, (in my copy Professor Peeters has marked a release at that point!!)

**Registration:** melody on a beautiful reed (preferably oboe 8') with a soft 16' Dulciana if you have it. L.H. needs clarity with string 8' and principal 4' (if not too dominant.)

**Tempo** on recording by Flor Peeters: 3' 25" or quarter note at 60.

#### 4. *Élégie* (opus 38)

Flor Peeters composed this piece in 1935 in about two hours on the night his beloved mother died; in it he expresses his grief and deep anguish at her loss. Throughout the piece there is a repeated dirge-like rhythm, at first in the pedals while the hands play a motive interwoven against itself in the highest two voices. As the emotion intensifies, the organist builds a very large crescendo in the middle section; and then gradually the stops are withdrawn as the emotion loses intensity. After a pause, the composer is consoled when he sees in a vision his mother in paradise with angels. The melody in the final section is from the Gregorian chorale "In paradise the angels are guiding thee" from the mass for the dead. It is the last melody sung in the mass.

On the first page the *ostinato* rhythm in the pedal is surging and marked, like a drum, and the first pedal note of the measure can be a little longer. Once the reeds are added to the pedal, make the rhythm more distinct by leaving more space between the repeated notes. On the last page, the L.H. plays the *ostinato* rhythm, which is less marked and more like a "heart palpitation" (his term).

The manuals must be played on an enclosed division in order to shape the phrases and to build the crescendo. This must be very expressive. In the manual voices, apply the "Rules for the Performance" (*Ars Organi*, vol. 1) ---common tones are tied, except in the melodic passages where common tones in the motive must be repeated to bring out the motive.

The 2 against 3 must be interpreted strictly. In the forte passage after the addition of reeds, play the triplets slower and in a style of declamation, with slight portato. Remember sufficient "breathing" space between phrases in the forte passage.

The tempo is *lento*. In the center section with the "appassionata" there can be a slight increase in tempo. At the end of this center section, there is a fermata over the barline which must be observed with a pause. The final section, the "heavenly vision", must be very slow with no impression of movement. The chorale melody should be played by thumbs on a lower manual. Before the final chord, reduce the registration to one stop and open the swell shutters so that the last chord can fade away into nothingness.

In building the crescendo, each time stops are added the swell shutters should be closed somewhat and then opened again gradually. In effecting the decrescendo, when stops are removed, remember to open the swell shutters a little and then use them in a continuing decrescendo.

Tempo on recording by Flor Peeters: 5' 38", quarter note at about 62.

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